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ABSTRACT

The use of a traveling teacher is one solution to the problem of providing on-the-spot training for Head Start teachers in small rural communities in remote regions of northern California. The State Department of Education, funded through a grant to Chico State College, implemented a staff development program whose chief feature was use of an itinerant teacher who spent one week in each of eight classrooms in six counties. In addition to giving practical helps in class, she taught a workshop course for which Chico granted one unit of lower division credit. The classes visited differed greatly in size, structure, ethnic composition and staff background. The teacher responded to each center's particular needs and wishes, working with both teaching and nonteaching personnel to help them plan and evaluate daily activities, arrange schedules and room organization, use classroom and community resources more creatively, and develop techniques helpful in working more effectively with children and parents. The itinerant teacher, on an extended contract, later prepared a manual to be used in those classrooms where she had worked. Recommendations for the continuation of the program and specific suggestions for its improvement are made. (WY)

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THE ITINERANT TEACHER

by
Camilla Collins

As one of eight consultants in the California State Department of Education's Bureau of Preschool Educational Programs, much interesting material crosses my desk. A paper by Lillian Katz and Mary Weir, Help for Teachers in Preschools: A Proposal, recently caught my attention on its way to our Curriculum File. Reading, I came across, "Another approach, called the 'itinerant trainer,' has come to our attention, although no written reports have been found. The 'itinerant trainer,' experienced and trained in preschool education, alighted in a small rural community in the remote regions of northern California. She spent several days in each Head Start center, bringing with her information and ideas, as well as "know how". She assisted in on-the-spot problem solving, demonstrating techniques and skills in the classrooms, and then moved to the next small community for a few days."

This statement took me back to the Spring of 1968 when I was Head Start Coordinator for Lassen-Modoc-Plumas-Tehama Community Action Agency in Northeast California, and one of a committee to plan and then implement a Head Start Supplementary Training Program that would serve the counties named as well as Butte, Placer and Shasta Counties. Actually, at that time we had not been able to obtain funding for a Head Start or State Preschool Program in Tehama County, so only six counties were involved. These six comprise an area larger than the combined states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island--over 400 highway miles separate the Alturas classroom from that in Auburn. This is not the California of beaches, palm trees, gentle weather, many people and abundant resources. It is a land of great distances, forests, high meadows, rugged mountains, deep valleys, long hard winters, sparsely populated and economically poor compared to central and southern California.

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Mrs. Alta Bell, Western Regional Director for Educational Projects, Inc., and Dr. Stella Gervasio, Head Start Regional Training Officer, gave our committee help in preparing a grant application to Educational Projects, Incorporated, and Chico State College, the only 4-year college in these counties, became the project grantee, with Mrs. Lois McDonald named as Associate Director under the umbrella of the Northern California P.A.C.E. Center, directed by Dr. B. Keith Rose. The 2-year community colleges of Butte, Shasta, Lassen, Feather River, and Sierra cooperated. At the inception of this project, only one of these community colleges offered classes in Child Development, Shasta College at Redding. While there was a willingness to offer such classes, finding qualified personnel to teach them was no easy task. At Feather River College in Qunicy, for instance, a physician was found to teach Child Development; Lassen College asked me to teach their first course. I added the teaching of a 3-unit Child Development class to my schedule, probably quite different from that taught by a physician. To illustrate the kind of cooperation given by the Community Colleges, Lassen College allowed this class to be scheduled for six hours on each of eight successive Saturdays, with observations and laboratory assignments in the preschool classes. We scheduled the lectures this way to cut down on travel time and costs, and in order to complete our meetings before the winter's snow and ice would be with us. Two of our non-professional staff members from Alturas journeyed 100 miles each way to those Saturday classes--one a mother of seven, the other a mother of three.

The participants in the Chico State College Head Start Supplementary Training Program were the Head Start employees in the six counties who planned to stay with preschool projects for low income groups. Those from the quad-county were probably typical of the group as a whole--educational backgrounds varied from the sixth grade to some college, and all who were eligible participated. Costs of tuition, fees and books were paid. Some counseling was provided. In some instances, costs of child care, travel and temporary living costs away from home

were allowed (I am told the latter are no longer available). Goals were set for the G.E.D. or High School Diploma, A.A. or B.A. Degree, whichever was the closest educational step.

In becoming acquainted with the needs of the enrollees in this vast area, Mrs. McDonald thought of the itinerant teacher who would spend a week with each Head Start class, helping them in their own very different situations, and at the same time offering one unit of lower division credit from Chico State College. This idea was greeted with much enthusiasm by our Head Start Supplementary Training Committee and resulted in the following announcement which fairly well describes our hopes and plans for the program. The class was named Workshop in Nursery School Practice and was listed in the Department of Home Economics.

June, 1968

POSITION:	Nursery School Master Teacher for Head Start Workshops, 2 months, September 10 - November 7, 1968 (some adjustment can be made on dates). One week in each of 8 classrooms in six Northern California counties: Butte, Shasta, Modoc, Lassen, Plumas, Placer.
EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS:	M.A. Degree with good background in Early Childhood Education and in nursery school experience.
SALARY:	$1,000 per month, plus mileage and $16 per diem.
WORKSHOP TITLE:	Nursery School Practice: Organizing the Daily Program. One unit junior college credit.
WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION:	Regular Head Start staff, some of whom are working for a junior college degree in Early Childhood Education, will meet with the master teacher daily in the classroom. The teacher will plan with the Head Start classroom teacher for her exact role, but

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION Continued: in general she is to plan with the staff each day's schedule and evaluate it with them, making special assignments as she wishes. The teacher will participate actively in the day's activities. Instructor planning will include: (1) physical set-up, organization of space and equipment; (2) scheduling of time; (3) recognition of the children with some discussion of how each child may best be helped; (4) suggesting creative program and materials, use of community resources; (5) observations on relationships, staff with each other, staff with parents; (6) techniques on how to handle pressures, such as accidents, tantrums, outside interruptions, terrible weather, upset parents; (7) give and take with staff on their concerns and questions.

Teacher will be asked to give a short summary or evaluation of each staff member taking the course for credit.

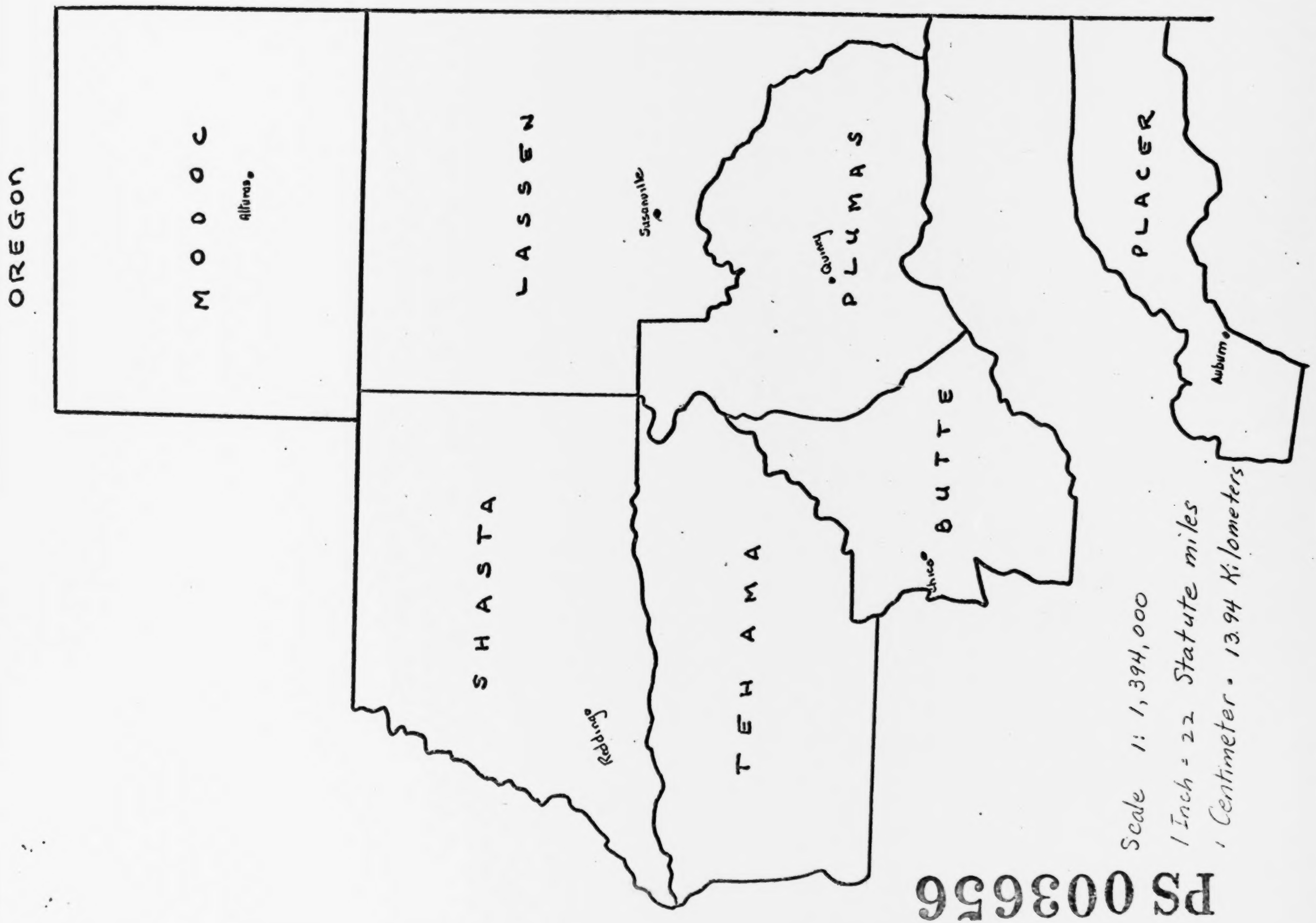
SKILLS REQUIRED: The teacher must have techniques for adapting the nursery program to a variety of physical set-ups including classroom layout and limited play yard situations.

The teacher must be comfortable in demonstration teaching. She must be willing to handle situations before the class to show ways of coping with problems as they arise.

The teacher must be able to get along well with all people, being friendly and accepting. Flexibility is a must for this assignment.

APPLICATION: Make application to Mrs. Lois McDonald, Associate Director, Head Start Supplementary Training Program, Chico State College, Chico, California, 95926.

Include a resume of education and experience. Include at least three references including someone who has had direct observation of applicant in nursery school practice.


NEVADA
OREGON
MODOC
Alturas
LASSEN
Susanville
PLUMAS
Quincy
PLACER
Auburn
SHASTA
Redding
TEHAMA
BUTTE
Chico
Scale 1: 1,394,000
1 Inch = 22 Statute miles
1 Centimeter = 13.94 Kilometers

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Of course, we were somewhat fearful that no qualified person would apply for such a temporary position and one that demanded so much moving about. Surprisingly, we had several strong candidates to choose from. Mrs. Joanna Koenen was chosen as the master teacher, a young woman with a Master's Degree from Pacific Oaks College, Claremont Graduate Center and extensive nursery school experience, including teaching in a Head Start program. She came from the southern part of the state with ideas, stamina, enthusiasm, a genuine interest in the people with whom she worked, as well as the individual children, their families and communities--and with a station wagon loaded with books, records, rhythm instruments, art materials and more classroom material than I can possibly remember.

The pattern Mrs. Koenen first tried worked so well that she followed it each successive week. She would arrive in a town on a Saturday, get settled in a motel, and spend the weekend meeting the director of the project and getting acquainted with the community. Monday found her observing the class throughout the entire morning, then meeting with the staff as soon as all had completed their chores--this meeting included the cook, housekeeper, and bus driver as well as the designated instructional team, since all were teachers according to our philosophy. At this session the staff members were expected to share with her their feelings about topics they would like to have covered during the week, perhaps certain children they would like her to study, demonstrations they hoped for, possibly an evening meeting with parents and/or others to take the place of one afternoon session. Mrs. Koenen in turn shared with them her impressions of their strengths and weaknesses, and ways in which she felt she could be of help. Out of this meeting a plan was developed for the week which included mornings in the regular Head Start class and then afternoon or evening meetings each day for all who expected credit.

Mrs. Koenen saw herself as a teacher trainer with an obligation to upgrade the professional skills and the career potentials of the Head Start employees.

She tried to evaluate each class, and as much as possible within a week's time to identify strengths and weaknesses and to provide a model through demonstrations to further strengthen the program. Her ideas meshed with ours, since she too saw play as a learning opportunity, did not see academic pressure as an answer to deprivation, believed we had an obligation to foster the mental health of children and their families, recognized the understanding of Child Development as basic to a successful program, and yet saw the need for curriculum planning--especially for those persons with little background in education and experience for their work. She came with an awareness that she had worked with many consultants, some helpful, some not, hoping she could help each teacher to be more successful. In the second week she concluded it was crucial that each student be aware of her own personal goals for young children and how these mesh with the agency's goals. This led to a lecture-discussion session on goals for each succeeding week, and the assignment of a paper on this topic for each person expecting to earn the one unit of credit.

The classes visited were so very different! In Chico, a city of 15,000 and home of Chico State College, there were two half-day classes and one Head Start Day Care Center offering an all-day program largely for children of single parents and held in a church. Redding, a somewhat smaller city, had three Head Start classes, a California Children's Center and a State Preschool Program--all were under the direction of the same person and all sponsored by a school district, so Head Start here shared Mrs. Koenen with these other programs. Susanville, a mountain town of 7,000, housed its Head Start class in a fairgrounds building which had many advantages, but some disadvantages such as a bathroom up a long flight of stairs. Here half of the enrollees were Indian children representing eight different tribes. In Alturas (about 3,000 population) the class was in a primary classroom in a regular elementary school--a third of the children were Indian. Quincy, about the same size, also had a class in a fairgrounds building, but a much easier one to adapt than that in

Susanville. Here a staff reflected the ethnic ratio shown in the enrollment--about half black, half white, the only place in the community where the two races were working together as equals for a common purpose. The little towns of Colfax, Lincoln, Rocklin near Auburn presented yet a different group of children, the bilingual Mexican-American.

A sampling of Mrs. Koenen's recommendations to individual classes were: One person must take the responsibility for overall coordination; examine the year's calendar and protect teachers from too much work; develop a more organized volunteer program; stimulate the children to make choices and develop their strengths; articulate with kindergarten and primary teachers; encourage more dramatic play; become familiar with the grant application and conditions.

Since all staffs seemed weak in the general area of music, rhythms, creative movement, and since Mrs. Koenen had a special interest and is strong in this field, shortly after the completion of her assignment as the itinerant teacher, she offered two weekend workshops at Butte College entitled, Workshop in Music, giving enrollees the opportunity to earn another one unit of lower division credit. Even an early snowstorm did not keep one mother-aide from making a round trip of 400 miles to attend this class!

After the completion of the visitations, it was decided Mrs. Koenen's contract should be extended by two weeks so that she could write a manual that would be helpful to those classes she now knew quite well, and to work with others involved to evaluate the concept of the travelling teacher and its implementation just completed.

All of us were in agreement the idea had real merit, and we reached agreement in certain changes we would recommend should it be possible to again have a "Journeying Joanna", as we hoped we might--in fact, now two years later, some of the participants are still asking for another such opportunity, especially

those farthest away from the four-year college and its varied course offerings. With the addition of Head Start and six California State Preschool classes in the region described since 1969, the need for staff development and career opportunities is now even greater.

The changes recommended are the following:

1. A questionnaire should be devised to mail to each program and used as a basis for the next project.
2. Programs should have some choice in the setting of dates for the visitations.
3. The trainer should have mimeographed work prepared to use and leave with each class.
4. The length of time spent with each class should be at least two weeks.
5. Prior to the visit, each classroom should receive a brochure stating objectives and areas in which the consultant is able to help.
6. The first day should be devoted to observations, the last to writing reports.
7. There should be an individual conference with each staff member.
8. The staff and Parent Advisory Committee should meet with the trainer to plan one parent meeting and possibly a volunteer meeting with her.

I would like to share with you one quote from Joanna Koenen, "Preschools employ the finest people alive--from Alturas to Auburn there were magnificent people involved. Washington should do a TV program on these people, their lives, backgrounds, hopes, dreams and how they work with children; their lives are worth sharing."

If people could understand the great hardships involved in getting an education for those who are working and receiving low incomes, often mothers of small children or large families, especially when they live far from institutions of higher learning, perhaps then there would be a willingness to bring education to them, and to provide mileage, per diem, and baby-sitting costs when they must be away from home. Provision of tuition and books is simply not enough for those who most need help in rural America. Let us not make them move into our crowded cities in order to prosper, but let us help them stay where their growing skills are so needed.